



Via ferrata gradings

The home of the via ferrata used to be in Tyrol, where the first tracks were built during the First World War to provide access and supplies to the patrols. Over the last few years, via ferrata have been booming, mostly in the Alps of western Europe. In Switzerland, about ten new via ferrata are created each year.

There are various regional gradings for via ferrata. In Switzerland, the “Hüsler grading” is gradually becoming the norm. Its name comes from Eugen E. Hüsler, who wrote a detailed document on Swiss via ferrata (“Wandern vertikal”, AT Verlag).

Levels	Route/terrain	Requirements	Examples
K1 (easy)	These are generally signposted routes. Generous number of lifelines for such an easy terrain.	Large natural steps. Where there are none, they are replaced by ladders, metal rungs or footbridges. More exposed passages are equipped with a rope or a chain (or handrail). Experienced climbers need no self-belay.	Alpbachschlucht Simmeflue
K2 (medium)	In some places, there are steep rocks, but the climbs are very well secured.	Almost vertical passages are equipped with metal rungs or ladders. A steel cable or a chain provide a lifeline even in slightly difficult terrain. Self-belaying is recommended.	Eiger-Rotstock, Rigidalstockgrat,
K3 (fairly difficult)	Rocky terrain with quite a pronounced slope, steep passages that are longer and sometimes exposed (equivalent to difficulty level III).	There is no passage requiring much strength in the arms. Self-belaying is necessary.	Tälli, Graustock, Angelino Monte Generoso Farinetta 1
K4 (difficult)	Steeper terrain, sometimes vertical. Short, well-secured overhangs. The climb is often very exposed and there are only small natural grips.	The exposed passages are only equipped with a steel cable (requires strength in the arms). Steps or metal handles are only provided at the most demanding passages. The athletic (“French”) via ferrata are an exception because they are much better secured but also present extremely exposed passages.	Allmenalp, Gantrisch, Tour d’Ai, Echelles de la Mort Farinetta 2
K5 (very difficult)	Via Ferrata in extremely rocky terrain.	Such via ferrata are often long, demanding over their entire length and therefore very exhausting.	Via ferrata in Evolène, third part,

		Some vertical passages are merely secured by a steel cable. Help points are only provided in extreme spots. Reserved for experienced via ferrata climbers in good physical condition.	Greitspitz, Rochers de Naye
K6 (extremely difficult)	For intrepid climbers with very strong arms, an iron mind and excellent physical condition.	Long and sparsely equipped passages in a vertical terrain, requiring stamina and strong arms. For via ferrata sport climbing, it may be helpful to wear climbing shoes (grip). Belaying by the climbing partner may be necessary.	Leukerbadner Piz Trovat 2 Farinetta 3

In addition to the difficulty gradings, the via ferrata are divided into four categories:

- Secured trails: rather easy trails where belaying is only needed over short passages.
- Alpine routes: routes through a glacier and/or a rocky terrain up to difficulty level II.
- Via ferrata: entirely secured climbing track with steel cables; the difficult passages are equipped with ladders, straight or U-shaped bars.
- Athletic via ferrata: like a via ferrata but with the addition of special attractions (bridges, rope ladders, zip lines).

June 2015

Safety during via ferrata

Via ferrata climbing involves risks. Poor preparation, deficient or inadequate equipment and/or behaviour may engender the risk of falling!

1. Prepare well for the climb

Good preparation is key to safely climbing a via ferrata. Obtain precise information on the difficulty level and the length of the track, access, return path, the weather and the conditions.

2. Choose your climb according to your ability

Too many difficulties reduce the climbing pleasure and may lead to dangerous situations.

3. Use full equipment that conforms to standards

Climbing harness, via ferrata set and helmet: only rigorous and proper handling of the equipment guarantees a safe climbing tour. A first aid kit as well as a mobile phone must be included in the equipment.

4 Do not practise in stormy weather

A stroke of lightning is synonymous with the risk of death. Rain, humidity and cold increase the risk of a fall.

5. Carefully check the cables and anchors

Falling rocks, snow pressure, freezing or corrosion may cause damage to the via ferrata equipment. Do not climb in a closed via ferrata.

6. Check your partner before starting out

Mutual check: securely fastened climbing harness, link between the via ferrata set, harness and helmet.

7. Maintain the proper distance

There must be no more than one person between two fixed points.

8. Communicate clearly when overtaking/being overtaken

Good communication and a little respect prevent dangerous situations during overtaking or when encountering other climbers.

9. Beware of falling rocks

Remain attentive to avoid falling rocks.

10. Respect nature and the environment

Travel by public transport or car pooling. Avoid litter and noise pollution.